

Contact: Tom Cook 406-444-1645 Release: Receipt

SOCIETY EXHIBIT OPENING RIGHT ON TRACK

Iron horse, puffer belly, engine or locomotive, regardless of what they were called, trains like rivers run through Montana history.

The Montana Historical Society will have a free public grand opening of its newest exhibit “On Track: The Railroad Photographs of Warren McGee” Friday (April 27) from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in Montana’s Museum just east of the Capitol.

McGee, who spent 41 years working on the railroad out of Livingston as brakeman and conductor, also photographed nearly everything about them from engines to trestles from the 1930s into the 1990s.

In addition to 40 of McGee’s magnificent photographs, the exhibit features railroad promotional posters, related artifacts, train models and a locomotive control panel recently removed from a diesel engine.

To help set the mood for the exhibit, the Society has a large wig-wag crossing signal in its lobby that is on loan from the Preservation Office of the City of Lewistown that was on the Burlington Northern tracks through that town before they were deactivated.

Jennifer Jeffries Thompson, a former Society staffer and currently a historical projects consultant, organized the Warren McGee Photograph Collection after it was donated by McGee to the Society in 1997. She also helped with the exhibit.

“Those who lived in the time when trains were the kings of transportation will feel a sense of nostalgia,” Thompson said “Younger people will get an appreciation for the power and spectacle of railroads.”

The collection includes more than 40,000 images. In addition to photos from the Northern Pacific Railway and later the Burlington Northern for which McGee worked, the collection includes photos from the Great Northern, Union Pacific, Milwaukee Road and other lesser know railroad lines in Montana and surrounding states.

“Warren was and is an amazing documentarian and chronicler – perhaps that comes from the attention to detail that railroaders have a passion for,” Thompson said.

He recorded with precision each exposure, noting dates, places, engine numbers, people’s names, and other significant information, she said.

Railroad historians and enthusiasts who have seen parts of the collection say that it is one of the best in the nation. “In the world of railroad history and photographs, it is well-known and of premier quality,” Thompson said. “The Society is very fortunate, indeed, to have the collection.”

Major funding for the exhibit was provided by the Northern Pacific Railway Historical Association and the Montana Department of Transportation.

McGee, who was born in Livingston in 1914, will make remarks at the opening.

Those who come will be able to sample “world famous” Northern Pacific baked potatoes with trimmings and apple pie prepared by the Friends of the Society. The Wilbur Rehman jazz ensemble with vocalist Patty Dean will provide the entertainment.

For more information call 406-444-4789.